

CLAIM AMENDMENTS

1. (Currently Amended) A tissue ablation system, comprising:
an elongate member having a proximal end and a distal end;
a ground electrode element mounted to the distal end of the elongate member, the ground electrode element being exposed to contact bodily fluid;
a protective element mounted to the distal end of the elongate member, wherein the protective element at least partially covers the ground electrode element to prevent the ground electrode element from contacting adjacent solid tissue, and wherein the protective element is incapable of conveying electrical energy between the solid tissue and the ground electrode element; and
an ablation electrode element configured for being positioned adjacent a target tissue region, wherein such that electrical energy, when conveyed between the ablation electrode element and the ground electrode element, ablates the target tissue region without ablating the solid tissue adjacent the ground electrode element.
2. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, wherein the protective element comprises a cage assembly.
3. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 2, wherein the cage assembly includes a proximal end, a distal end, and a plurality of struts secured between the proximal end and the distal end.
4. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 2, wherein the cage assembly comprises a ring element that coaxially surrounds and is slidable relative to the elongate member.

5. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 4, wherein one of the proximal end and the distal end of the cage assembly comprises the ring element, and the other of the proximal end and distal end is fixedly secured to the elongate member.

6. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 5, wherein the proximal end of the cage assembly comprises the ring element, and the distal end of the cage assembly is fixedly secured to the elongate member.

7. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 5, wherein the distal end of the cage assembly comprises the ring element, and the proximal end of the cage assembly is fixedly secured to the elongate member.

8. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, further comprising a sleeve having a lumen in which the elongate member is slidably disposed.

9. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, wherein the protective element has an expanded configuration when outside the lumen of the sleeve, and a collapsed configuration when inside the lumen of the sleeve.

10. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, wherein the protective element is made from an electrically non-conductive material.

11. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, wherein the protective element comprises a braided or woven structure.

12. (Cancelled).

13. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, further comprising a steering mechanism for steering the distal end of the elongate member.

14. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, wherein the elongate member is a catheter member.

15-17. (Cancelled).

18. (Previously Presented) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, wherein the protective element circumscribes the ground electrode element.

19-25. (Cancelled).

26. (Newly Added) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, further comprising a tissue ablation source having a positive terminal coupled to the ablation electrode element, and a negative terminal coupled to the ground electrode element.

27. (Newly Added) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, wherein the ground electrode element and the ablation electrode element are configured for contacting opposite surfaces of a wall.

28. (Newly Added) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, further comprising another elongated member having a distal end to which the ablation electrode element is mounted.

29. (Newly Added) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, wherein the protective element is electrically insulated from the ground electrode element, such that the only electrical path between ground electrode element and the solid tissue can be formed through the bodily fluid.

30. (Newly Added) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, wherein the protective element is configured for being completely electrically insulated from the solid tissue when in contact with the solid tissue.

31. (Newly Added) The tissue ablation system of claim 1, wherein the protective element does not hinder the ablation electrode element from contacting the target tissue region.